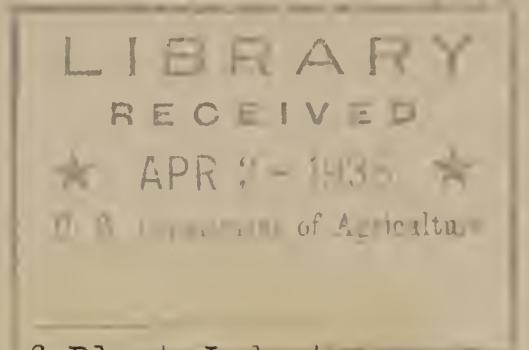


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## THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 50 associate NBC radio stations, Monday, March 23, 1936.

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Hello folks. As I have looked out of the south windows of the new Agricultural building during the past week the most striking object to catch my eye was the turbid, boiling Potomac river at high flood stage and of a deep yellow mud-laden color. Ordinarily the Potomac river is a peaceful stream with sky-blue waters that reflect the willows that grow along its banks. For the past week this peaceful river has been a death-dealing surging torrent that has carried destruction in its wake. It has carried in its turbulent waters thousands of tons of soil torn from the farms and orchards of the Shenandoah and Cumberland regions. The Potomac has been only one of the many streams that drain the flood waters from the Northeastern States that have been at flood stage during the past two weeks and I doubt if any estimate can be placed upon the loss in soil that has been removed from the orchards and cultivated fields of this northeastern section. The problem that now confronts our fruit and vegetable growers and farmers in general is how to prevent further losses and how to restore the fertility of their acres.

Most of this loss has occurred on lands that are in cultivation, lands that did not have any soil binding crop upon them, or at least where the soil binding crops were not sufficient to hold the soil from washing. In the orchard it is doubtful if anything but a heavy turf of grass will completely protect the soil during heavy rains, but there are objections to keeping an orchard constantly in sod. Strips of sod are a wonderful safeguard against sheet erosion in hillside orchards and where a new orchard is being planted on steep land the contour method with the steeper parts of the contours in heavy sod will largely safeguard against the loss of soil. It so happens that the steeper and higher ground is usually best for fruit production on account of air drainage and protection from frost at blooming time, and it is a question of safeguarding the land against washing. Many of the orchards of the northeastern sections have been washed and gullied by the recent heavy rains necessitating much work in stopping gullies and checking the surface washing of the soil around the trees. The use of additional fertilizer and the planting of soil improving crops in orchards will be essential in many cases if the trees are to be maintained in a producing condition. My thought is that our fruit growers everywhere should adopt a plan that will not only check further soil losses but also improve the soil that remains through a better system of soil management. No doubt some of you are saying that it is easy for me to sit here at the microphone and make all of these suggestions but not so easy to put into effect. It is not an easy problem for you folks who are in the fruit or vegetable growing business but it is a problem that must be faced and the sooner it is faced the better.

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Soil erosion is a serious matter with our vegetable growers who are practically compelled to keep their soil under cultivated conditions at all times. Erosion and soil loss may not be much of a problem on certain of the more level trucking lands like the sandy loams of Eastern Virginia and Maryland and of Delaware and southern New Jersey, or on the great peat beds of the Great Lakes region, but there are thousands of acres of cabbage, potatoes, beans, peas, sweet corn and tomatoes being grown on land that is more or less rolling and which washes badly. The problem is to so handle these lands that the cream of the soil will not be washed away.

Many of our commercial truck farmers are resorting to strip cultivation as a means of preventing soil erosion. Others are planting on contours with the natural drainage or low areas left in heavy sod to prevent the formation of gullies. Keeping the land planted to rye or some cover crop when it is not in actual market crop will help but during torrential downpours such as we had recently the cover crop is often insufficient to prevent washing. Even our home gardens are subject to erosion and the loss of precious soil and much as I dislike to see the remains of the old crops left in the garden during the winter, this is better than leaving the ground absolutely unprotected.

In many sections home gardens and truck farms have been under water and are covered with sand, silt or various kinds of drift, and a great amount of cleaning and reconditioning will be required. In some cases this flooding may benefit the land but in many other cases years of attention will be required to get the soil back to the proper condition. Where the soil has not been washed away or deeply covered with sand or silt it may merely mean a general cleanup and planting of crops as soon as the ground is dry enough. In other cases it may pay to plant the land in soil improvement crops for one or two seasons to get it back into condition. Some of you folks who live along rivers that are still in the flood stage have a real problem for spring is right upon us so it will be up to you to get busy with your gardens as soon as the waters recede and the ground becomes workable. If we can be of any help to you we shall be glad to have you call upon us but in most cases you can get advice either from your local county agent or from your State College and Experiment Station.

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